

March 13, 2022

Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary,

I am a resident of West Hartford, and a member of Congregation Beth Israel, a founding member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA). I am also a member of Progressive Women of Greater Hartford and a white suburban mother and grandmother.

I am writing **IN SUPPORT** of:

- S.B. No. 387 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.

I am writing **IN OPPOSITION** to the following bills:

- S.B. No. 365 AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS
- S.B. No. 388: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFENSE OF A PERSON OR A PERSON'S DWELLING, PLACE OF WORK OR MOTOR VEHICLE.
- H.B. No. 5418 AN ACT REVISING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATUTES AND INSURANCE STATUTES CONCERNING THEFT OF A MOTOR VEHICLE
- H.B. No. 5417 AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE AND SERVICES AND FIREARMS BACKGROUND CHECKS.
- S.B. No. 386 AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF THE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY LAWS OF THIS STATE.

The bills I am opposed to will not solve the problem of juvenile crime in the suburbs. Do not pass this legislation in my name.

These are the issues that concern me:

1/ Being Fearful and Crime Rhetoric

Over the past few months, members of our congregation were carjacked in West Hartford, and the experiences were traumatic. Yes, I feel fear living in

West Hartford, because carjackings and auto thefts happened to our friends. Yes, I would like those responsible to be held accountable for this.

But right now there is so much rhetoric and misinformation being spread that suggest a juvenile crime wave. We are not in a crime wave. This is simply not supported by data. This rhetoric just increases our fear. The legislators sponsoring these bills know this. I suspect they are hoping they will look tough on crime, and thus gain our votes.

2/ Unequal Accountability

I agree that all children need to be held accountable equally. But the truth is black and brown children are more likely to be arrested and sent to prison than white children.

Here is a statistic that was really powerful to me:

In 2019, 43% of youth admitted to detention were black.

Only 12% of the youth population is black.

In 2019, 6% of youth admitted to detention were white.

61% of the youth population are white

Are black children more evil than white children? I don't believe that. This discrepancy is caused by the racial bias that is within our juvenile justice system—sentencing discrepancies or the greater police presence in poorer neighborhoods, for example. It is also true that most white youth have better access to services like mental health treatment, and often parents have the ability to pay for needed services.

Harsh bills will target children of color with far more regularity.

3/ Bad Proposals

One of the proposals is to more easily incarcerate youth criminals, and to provide the services they need, like health care and mental health care services. But what they are suggesting is that we provide these services in *a prison*. These kids are just starting out in their lives. Early interaction with the punitive side of law enforcement raises the chances that a young person will again end up in prison later in their life. I certainly would not want my children to go to a prison, no matter how “nice” it is! Another proposal suggests we send fourteen-year-olds to an adult court. I don't

believe young teens should be in the adult system. The adult courts are not equipped to serve children.

Let's hold kids accountable in an appropriately developmental way, one that will steer the kids onto the right track.

Short term solutions, like the JJPOC, or regional collaboration among police departments, are important to keep intact. We also can certainly increase mental health treatment.

Long term solutions, like affordable housing, public education, job training, and healthcare, need to be addressed now. Unfortunately, we don't seem to have the political will to even get started on these. Increasing the availability of affordable housing in our towns, for instance, gets tremendous pushback from suburban residents.

City dwellers and we suburbanites need to embrace the fact that we are in this together. That is the real solution to the issue of juvenile crime.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully,
Jane Zande
West Hartford